

2021 Stewardship

*Certainly the faithful love of the Lord hasn't ended; certainly God's compassion isn't through!
They are renewed every morning. Great is your faithfulness.
I think: The Lord is my portion! Therefore, I'll wait for him.*

Lamentations 3:22-24 (Common English Bible)

It is strange to kick off a stewardship letter with words from the Bible's book of lament, Lamentations. And yet, it feels fitting. How do we continue to praise God amidst such upheaval, amidst the uncertainty of a global pandemic, racial apocalypse, climate crisis, and national turmoil? What we do is we hold fast to God's faithfulness despite all that would seem to drive us to despair.

This year, we have weathered an incredible storm together as a community. Some of the brightest spots have been the moments of fellowship over Zoom and Facebook, the phone calls of support, and the care packages that lighten the day's heavy burden. We lament the loss of so many lives and we stand firm together as God's people, persisting through the struggle because we trust that God is our portion, our sustaining Presence, our stable and firm foundation. God stands in solidarity with us, suffers with all creation, knows the struggle, and walks alongside us.

As you consider how you give back to God's work in our church in the coming year, I encourage you to focus on two key motivations. First, may it be an act of solidarity. We stand together and on behalf of all who long for refuge and shelter amidst this storm. Our pledges and financial gifts speak to this belonging to one another, for one another, through it all. Second, may it be an act which ensures stability for the good work God has for us in the days, months, and years to come. While the world shifts and swirls, the work of God's church does not change — we are called to stand firm in the love of Christ to bring a witness of hope for all people.

And we are doing this. While this year has been difficult, it has also been a great opportunity to grow and strengthen our witness as a community. The church has scattered into our homes, and, in doing so, the Church has been sent out into the world in a way unlike any of us have experienced. And this is Good News — God's people are standing in solidarity together, offering a firm foundation of loving kindness wherever we find ourselves.

Please prayerfully consider maintaining your sustaining pledge for the 2021 year. We anticipate the growth and new steps of mission that God has in store for us. I pray that we may continue to hold fast, continue to lament all that we have lost, and continue to persist in faithfulness as one body, in Christ, together.

In this packet, you will find exciting highlights of the acts of solidarity and stability God is calling us to. Thank you for your part in this powerful work, as well.

Grace and peace,

Pastor Seth



Solidarity & Stability

Our staff, session, deacons, volunteers, and congregation have all demonstrated resilience as St. James continues to thrive despite an incredibly disruptive season. This year, we have welcomed new members and regular visitors as we continue to worship and connect in meaningful ways. Even as we shifted to 'physically distanced' settings, our values of **Loving Welcome** and **Joyful Practice** for youth and adults of all ages have adapted. We have experienced stability in pledges and giving during 2020, allowing us to continue to fully fund not only our staff and our facilities, but also to uphold our commitment to **Compassionate Service** to those in need and to our environment.

On behalf of the St. James Community, thank you for your stable support, which allows us to stand in solidarity with one another, remaining resilient through tough times. As you consider sustaining an existing pledge, or making a new one, we hope you will prayerfully consider a few important commitments for the coming year.

Beyond COVID – Race and Equity Work

The year 2021 is an opportunity for us to learn more deeply and act more purposefully when it comes to race and equity. Recently, St. James was awarded a \$5,000 'Beyond COVID' grant from the Northwest Coast Presbytery towards this ongoing work. In response, the session plans to offer a matching grant to support learning materials and training for our staff, leadership, and community. As we look ahead, we hope that this is just the jumpstart to sustained commitment to practicing social justice and loving welcome to all.

Benevolent Giving

As those within and outside our congregation continue to adjust to the impacts of COVID-19, our session hopes to restore St. James' overall percentage of benevolent giving from its current 8% back to 10% of pledged giving. This increase would help our Mission and Social Action Committee partner more strongly with our community. In 2020, St. James provided significant financial support to Interfaith Coalition, Lighthouse Mission, Habitat for Humanity, and the Bellingham Food Bank as well as to several other important agencies such as Skookum Kids, Whatcom Peace and Justice, DVSAS, and others.

Connecting in New Ways

2020 has been an invitation to explore new methods of connecting and gathering. Looking forward to 2021, St. James has an opportunity to strengthen and expand our use of technology. Through remote Sunday worship, daily prayer, book studies, phone calls, e-mails, handwritten notes, 'Zoom' youth group, and even a virtual VBS, we have offered vital avenues of connection during a time of 'disconnect.' Even as we again gather in-person, we see technology upgrades as a way to increase accessibility to our community for many.

Thank you for taking some time to consider a commitment to St. James for 2021. Please return your pledge form by **November 1** and contact Marina McLeod (stjamestreasurer.bham@gmail.com) or Lindsay Anderson (lindsaynicole12@gmail.com) with questions.

